

A N
ACCOUNT
OF THE
Conduct of the Ministers
With Relation to the
PEERAGE-BILL:
IN A
LETTER to a Friend in
the Country.

Sero sapiunt Phryges.

L O N D O N:

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ACCOUNT

OF THE

Comptroller of the Treasury

RECEIPTS

for the year ending
the 31st day of December

1860

1861

1862

1863

1864

1865

TO THE READER.

I Must observe, that the following Letter was written about Four Months agoe, in Compliance to the Curiosity of a Private Gentleman, who has been some Tears a Stranger to the Town. This will appear, from several Passages, to a candid Reader: And if he desires to know how it comes to be now made Publick; I must Answer, that it is wholly owing to the Hopes many have, That the Peerage-Bill, which failed last Year in the Hands of the Ministry, may take Effect in the present Session: A Benefit which I had despaired of ever seeing Twice offered to a Headstrong People.

To this Letter is added, by way of Appendix, a Paper which was Published last Year, with an Intention to moderate the unreasonable Vehemence of the Persons, who

To the Reader.

opposed a Design, they had never coolly considered: Both which Pieces together may furnish the Reader with such Reflections as may incline him, on this and other Occasions, to think Twice, before he determines to pronounce his Opinion in Matters relating to the Welfare or Detriment, of the whole Community.

S I R,

London, August 10, 1719.

S I R,

SINCE, for your private Satisfaction, you desire to know my impartial Sentiments of the Peerage-Bill, which made so great a Noise towards the Close of the last Session of Parliament ; as likewise to be informed of the Reasons for dropping it in the House of Lords, when it seem'd to be heartily espoused by the Ministers ; I shall comply with your Request in as few Words as possible, without offering to embarras you with the Multiplicity of Arguments and Sophistry, used as well in favour of, as in Opposition to the Bill.

It is not without Reason that you complain of the Perplexity of the Question,

tion, as it has been handled on both sides in Print ; since, in my Opinion, neither of the Parties concerned have thoroughly understood the Matter in Debate ; or, at least, they have very artfully concealed their Knowledge. But, there are certain Seasons of Time, in which it is very difficult to write or to read without Prejudice : And, were the same Authors to take the same Subject into their Consideration in the dead, unprofitable Season of the Vacation from Business, when the Tide of Interest is at the lowest Ebb, they would, probably, reason quite differently, and the Reader would judge of their Reasons after a different manner.

In Compliance with the first part of your Demand, I shall observe, that the material Considerations relating to the intended Peerage-Bill, lie in a very narrow compass ; and that there is no End of rambling after Suppositions and Surmizes. Did the Bill tend to the Good or to the Detriment of the Constitution
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in General? Would it have confirmed or subverted the Liberties of the People? Would it have prevented the future Abuse of the Prerogative in Creating Peers? Would it have diminished the Privileges of the Commoners, or have given any new Power to the Lords? Would it have tended naturally to settle, or to unsettle the Minds of Self-interested and Ambitious Men? And, lastly, were the Evils apprehended, as probable and as numerous, as the Advantages hoped for from the Bill? These are the proper Questions, which a Lover of his Country should have put to himself on this Occasion: and not, whether the Bill was agreeable or disagreeable to the Persons, who are entrusted with the Management of our Affairs.

If then, Sir, upon a Review of the principal Arguments, urged from the Right and the Left in this Controversy, you will catechize your self after this manner; I make no doubt, but you will
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have more Reason, than ever, to wish the Peerage-Bill had taken Effect. Having thus let you into the Method of judging, by which I determin'd my own Opinion in this Pamphlet-Scuffle ; I need not give my self the Trouble of recapitulating the opposite Reasons, with which the Press daily teemed : you have the several Pieces and Papers, and you have leisure to sort the Arguments, and weigh them one by one : Remembring still, that one evident substantial Reason will outweigh a Thousand precarious Surmizes cast into the opposite Ballance.

I come now to the Second Part of your Enquiry, which is more intricate than the former. Nevertheless, I believe, I shall be able to account for the Abortiveness of this Bill, which to you and your Neighbours seemed very desirable in many Respects.

First then ; Let us suppose the Project of the Peerage-Bill to have been good and advantageous to the Community ; and that it manifestly appeared in
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this Light at first to the Men of Penetration. This Consideration alone was sufficient to raise a powerful Opposition against it from two different Parties. You know, the Enemies of the present Government are not few in Number ; and it is always to be expected from such a Faction, that they will be industrious to raise a Clamour to obstruct all Designs that may tend to the Good of the Subject, and the Glory of the Prince ; that so the Protestant Succession (as far as lies in their Power) may seem to be no mighty Blessing even to a Protestant Nation. But, besides the Forces from this Quarter, who took up Arguments against the Bill, there came in a considerable Body of Allies to assist them, not upon the Principle of Disaffection to the Government, but out of Hatred to the present Ministers. I believe it may be truly said, there never was a Ministry, whose Adversaries were not more industrious to overthrow them, than their Friends were vigilant and zealous to support

port them : And this may be affirmed more notoriously of our present Statesmen ; because a late Defection has not a little contributed to encourage their Adversaries, and to dishearten their Friends. Now again, supposing the intended Bill to have been a Master-stroke in sound Politicks ; do we not know the unreasonable Resentments of angry Courtiers sufficiently, to be persuaded, that they will not scruple to obstruct any Advantage to the Publick, which they think may turn to the Honour and Establishment of a Set of Men, whose Employments they covet ?

In the Second Place, I am to inform you, that many Persons, well intentioned to the Government, and amongst them, several who entertained a favourable Opinion of the Ministry, were Strongly Prepossessed against the Bill, even before they knew one Clause in it. It was Easy to observe the mighty and sudden Ferment, which on this Occasion was raised throughout the Town :
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By which Artifice, Hundreds of warm, superficial Reasoners were drawn in to declare themselves openly against the Bill in the most positive manner; and thereby so far to engage their Honour and their Judgment, that they could not retract, nor even moderate their Assertions, without incurring the Suspicion of having trafficked with some Court-Brokers. Others (no doubt) joined in the prevailing Outcry, because they imagined their Ambitious Desires were in Danger to be precluded: And some, perhaps, who could have no Hopes of being Lords Themselves, were influenced by certain Persons, who feared they might lose the Perquisites of procuring Titles for such as were willing to pay any Price for them.

To these Obstructions it will be proper to add; That several Things happened, not long before the Bill was brought into the House of Lords, with which many Zealous Friends of the Government were not a little dissatisfied,

and for which in their Hearts they reproached the Ministry; and consequently were the more ready to discourage them in their new Project. Neither had the Ministers condescended to advise with their Friends concerning their Scheme: whereas, in an Affair of so great Importance, it had been prudent to obviate their Surprize, and to prepare their Minds, so as to secure their Assent by proper Reasons: An Oversight, which the Adversaries of the Bill made no small Advantage of, by insinuating, that there must be some latent Mischief in the Designs of our Statesmen, from the great Secrecy, which appeared in their Proceedings.

Now, Sir, I doubt not, but you will think these concurring Circumstances were sufficient to stifle the most hopeful Project in a divided Nation, in this Age of Corruption; when most Men in their different Parties, act by the Motives of either Passion or Interest. But, there were yet more Difficulties, which
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contributed to this shameful Defeat ; some of which I shall briefly mention for your further Satisfaction. Some of the most noted *Tories* (for what Reasons they best know) declared for the Bill ; which made several well meaning *Whigs* suspect their was some sinister Design at the Bottom. There was likewise too great a Majority in the House of Lords for it ; which alone greatly encreased the Jealousy of the Commons ; and this very Argument was artfully urged by all the Opposers of the Bill. Besides, never was any Proposal so ill timed : at that very Juncture, we were threatned, and very much allarmed with an Invasion from *Spain* : And the general Opinion was, that it was the most perverse Management to give a Handle of debating and wrangling amongst our selves, when we stood in Danger of a Foreign Enemy, who depended on the Strength and Assurances of a Number of our own dissaffected People.

All these Considerations, put together, make me (who have no great Faith in Statesmen) apt to imagine, That the Ministers themselves were not so sincere and earnest in the Work, as they seemed to be: Wherefore else these manifest Oversight in the Conduct of this mighty Affair? They might (for ought we know) offer it only as a seemingly Popular and disinterested Bill; or perhaps to free Themselves from the Importunities of many Commoners, that insisted upon coming into the Upper House, for their Services in the Lower. You, who have wasted the most active season of your Life about the Court, will not think those Surmizes extravagant: And for my Part, I shall not be absolutely convinced of the Sincerity of the Ministry in this Particular, till such Time as they resume the Bill, and concert their Measures better, to make it Effectual: For which Service they would highly merit the Thanks of every Honest, Unambitious *Englishman*; since such an Act of

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Parliament (I am with you persuaded).
would prove the greatest Security to our
Genuine and Antient Constitution ; and
the giving of the Royal Assent to it
would be not only the greatest, but the
wisest Instance of Condescension and
Goodness, that ever came from the
Throne.

I am, S I R,

Your most Affectionate

and most Obedient Servant,

S. T.

The

THE
MODERATOR
IN THE
Present Controversy
Relating to the
PEERAGE BILL.

----- *Hinc semper Ulixes*
Criminibus terrere novis hinc spargere
Voces
In vulgum ambiguas ----- Virg.

I Have heard and I have read (I believe) every Argument, that has been urged on both Sides in the general Debates on the Peerage Bill: And, because the Disputants of either Party seem to give themselves up to Prepossessions, and to disregard the Rules of fair reasoning

reasoning (no uncommon Oversight in Controversies about Affairs of State) I hope it will not be taken amiss, if I attempt to suggest some Considerations, which may enable them to canvass the Question like Logicians; unless the contending Patriots should think, that Impartiality may warp the Judgment of Politicians.

I. Let popular Clamour (which ever way it drives) be thrown out of the Argument, since it veers like the Wind, and may be influenced by many open and secret Methods: Then, it is as often known to blow full against Truth, as in the Teeth of Error.

II. Let the Approbation of a Court be likewise thrown out of the Argument; for when a Project seems to be countenanced by a Ministry, may not the Opposition raised against it be supposed to proceed as naturally from ill Will towards the Ministers, as from good Will towards the Publick? more especially

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since the late notorious Divisions amongst the Whiggs.

III. Every Proposal which has the Appearance of Novelty, is at first received with great Partiality; whereas in time (if no Artifices are used) it generally loses or gains in the Opinions of honest Men, according to its intrinsic Merit.

IV. A new Proposal is apt to awaken our Hopes and our Fears, according as it is represented: But with this Difference, that our Fears (when we are in no desperate Condition) are much stronger than our Hopes; and that it is much easier to alarm us with Apprehensions of Inconveniencies, than to quiet us with the Prospect of Advantages.

Having thrown these Reflections in the way to hinder the Parties concerned from arguing hereafter on full Speed, I proceed to some Observations on the Management of the present Debate.

I. Most of the Arguments on both Sides, disinterestedly considered, are but Surmises, a sort of Syllogistical Predictions

ons. The Combatants against the Bill suggest Fears and dismal Apprehensions; those for the Bill ply us with Hopes and comfortable Consequences; and both seem to proceed upon Probability in their Surmises. But then, we are not aware, how we suffer our Reason to be over-born by an improbable Fear, against a probable Hope.

II. Hence, by artfully engaging Men by the stronger Passion, when this Controversy was first set on Foot; the Volunteers against the Bill came in readily; and appearing much superior to their Antagonists in Number, triumphed with little Opposition.

III. When the Debate was moved from the Coffee-houses to the Press, the Opposers of the Bill wasted the first Paper, and gained a second Triumph; till the Minority thus shamefully baffled, at last took Courage and made a Stand with no ill Success, considering they had lost the Advantage of the first, and even second Blow.

From these Remarks, one may suspect, that the Arguments for the Bill will not for the present meet with fair Play without Doors, because they were generally condemned before they were known. The last Appeal therefore for Equity must be to the House of Commons; where the Hopes, the Fears, the white and the black Surmises, will find Admittance on the same Day; and each have a Hearing interchangeably.

If Surmises be allowed to pass for Proofs, whether the Number of Peers be limited, or remains unlimited, there may on both Sides, be Suppositions of a forbidding Aspect started with seeming Probability; as it happens in all important Cases, where there is a Scope for Invention, and much may be plausibly urged on either Hand. Thus it was in the last Bill relating to the Dissenters; and thus in the Arguments for and against reducing the Forces; the latter of which, it was easy to foresee, would
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prove a very unthrifty Expedient for saving the publick Money.

The present Question has been split into so many Considerations by both Parties, that it cannot clearly be decided, but by stripping it of less material Inquiries, till the principal Point is first determined. Now the principal Point to be considered is, Whether the Constitution will be endangered more manifestly hereafter, by leaving the Peerage intirely unlimited, or by limiting it under proper Restrictions. Herein lies the whole Stress of the Debate ; and to avoid running it into a tedious Argument, and into Subtilities, which only perplex the Judgment ; it is plain, that if the Crown goes on to augment the Number of Peers, the Constitution will in a few Years more be manifestly indangered, if not subverted : But on the other Hand, it is not plain, that if the Number of Peers be limited, that the Constitution will be either manifestly endangered or subverted hereafter, by Means of the
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Limitation : The Conclusion thereof, which follows, is that by limiting the Number of Peers, a positive Evil will be prevented, and no positive Evil (unless Surmises can be positive) is urged against a Limitation.

Since I have taken upon me to be only a *Moderator* in this Controversy, I shall detain the Reader but with two Reflections more, which have in them no Intricacy, and are proper to moderate the Opinions of those, who desire to judge impartially of the Consequences of passing or rejecting the Bill now in Agitation.

As soon as the House of Lords went upon taking into their Consideration the State of the Peerage, and the intended Bill thereupon became the Subject of Conversation every where ; How warmly did most Gentlemen talk against it ? Every Man's Passion betrayed the secret Ambition of his Heart, and manifested the strong Desire the Commoners universally have of becoming Peers. Is it
not

not then time, nay, Is it not absolutely necessary to check, and even to kill this growing Humour? And this (I believe) cannot be effectually done by any other Expedient, but by properly limiting the Number of Peers.

Lastly, While this Humour prevails, I need not labour to prove, that many of the wealthy Members, and the young aspiring Gentlemen in the House of Commons, will in all their Views be perpetually pushing up to the House of Lords; and consequently may be easily biaſſed in Affairs which ought to be their principal Care; for it has, and will hereafter often come to paſs, that aſſerting the Rights and Privileges and Interests of the People, is not the moſt infallible Method of obtaining a Peerage.

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not in the least, it is not at all
necessary to think, and even to feel, this
growing thing out? And this (I believe)
cannot be effectually done in any other
Expedient but by properly limiting the
Number of Members.

It is true, this Humour prevails,
I do not know to what, that many
of the worthy Members, and the young
men of the Opposition, in the House of
Commons, will in all this View be
particularly putting up to the House of
Peers; and consequently may be easily
blinded to Affairs which ought to be
their principal Care; for it has, and
will hereafter often come to pass, that
regarding the Rights and Privileges and
Interests of the People, is not the most
infallible Method of obtaining a Peer.

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